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# Hudson - Meng Bison Bonebed

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# Hudson-Meng Bison Bonebed

**A**bout 10,000 years ago, over 600 bison died in an arroyo now located on the Oglala National Grassland in Western Nebraska. Were humans involved in killing the bison? Or did the bison die a natural death, possibly asphyxiated by a raging prairie fire? Why did so many die at once and in such a small area?

*These are examples of the many intriguing questions archeologists and volunteers hope to answer as they continue to probe the past during future excavations in the next decades.*

## Excavation History

**T**he bones were discovered in the 1950's during the construction of a stock pond. Although originally dismissed as sheep skeletons, Albert Meng, a nearby rancher, and Bill Hudson, an auto parts store owner, both amateur archeologists, refused to believe this. Their persistent efforts to study the site paid off in 1968, when they convinced Dr. Larry Agenbroad, then professor of Earth Science at Chadron State College, to investigate. Systematic excavations between 1971 and 1977 started to reveal a picture of prehistoric life on the Great Plains. Stone tools and projectile points found among the bones indicated that humans were a part of the picture. Based on this evidence, scientists first hypothesized that a small band of nomadic hunters stampeded the bison over a cliff.

In 1976, the site was placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The site remained undisturbed from 1978 until 1991, when Forest Service archeologist Terri Liestman encouraged Dr. Larry Todd, Colorado State University, and Dr. Dave Rapson, University of Wyoming, to reopen the site. These excavations have suggested human involvement, as well as evidence that carnivorous animals and many formational processes played a part in the way the bonebed looks today. Excavations in 1993 showed that no cliff existed 10,000 years ago, thus eliminating the "jump" theory. Scientists dismissed another theory that the bison died in a snow storm when dental studies showed that the spring calves were as young as 2 months old at death. Today, they are understandably cautious in suggesting new theories, though many suspect the bison died in a violent prairie fire or a lightning storm. Only additional study will tell us the "true" story of why over 600 of an extinct plains bison species lie in a 10,000 year old tomb.



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## Future Research

**B**esides the story of the bison, the Hudson-Meng site is scientifically significant for other reasons. The site provides an opportunity to study human habitation in the area for at least a 10,000 year period. An environmental record of climate and plant communities over the same time period is also available for continuing study and interpretation.

During the ongoing "digs", archeologists, geomorphologists, paleobotanists, students, and volunteers hope to uncover more information about the people and animals associated with the site and to investigate a variety of other questions as well, including:

- ★ How did the bison actually die?
- ★ Where is the bonebed perimeter?
- ★ How does the present climate differ from the prehistoric environment?
- ★ How do the prehistoric bison differ from the current species?
- ★ How did people use this area over the past 10,000 years?

Because Hudson-Meng is located on public land, it belongs to all Americans. The Nebraska National Forest manages the Oglala National Grassland for multiple uses and recognizes the importance of this unique resource.

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## Future Planning

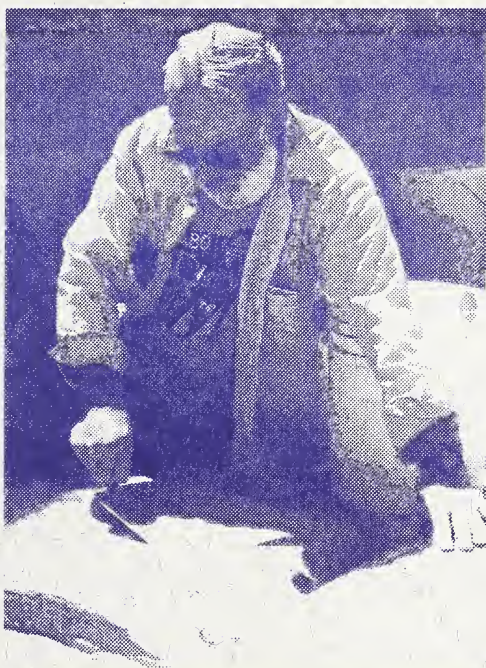
**C**urrent plans call for constructing two facilities. The first, an enclosure over the bonebed to be completed in 1998. The second, an interpretive and research center, called the Prehistoric Prairies Discovery Center, to be located just east of the Crawford City limits on Fort Robinson State Park land.

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These facilities will allow year-round interpretation for visitors and excavation and research opportunities for scientists. Interpretive exhibits and guided tours will provide visitors with up-to-date information as the 10,000 year old drama continues to unfold.

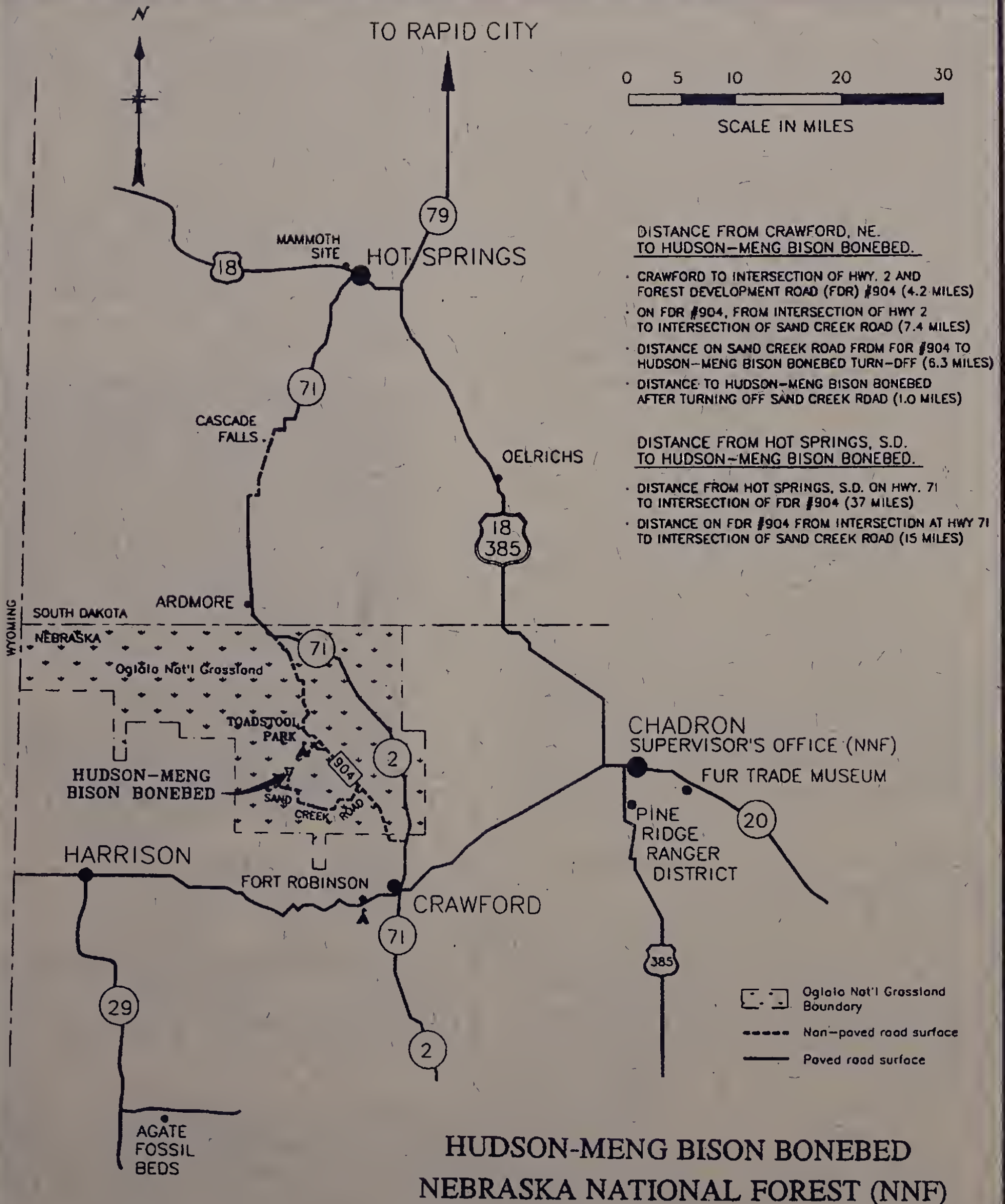
Visitors are welcome to view the excavation during the field season each year and learn more about our predecessors on the plains. For information about excavation schedules contact the Nebraska National Forest, (308) 432-0300; Pine Ridge Ranger District, (308) 432-4475; or Trailside Museum, (308) 665-2929.



#### PARTNERSHIPS

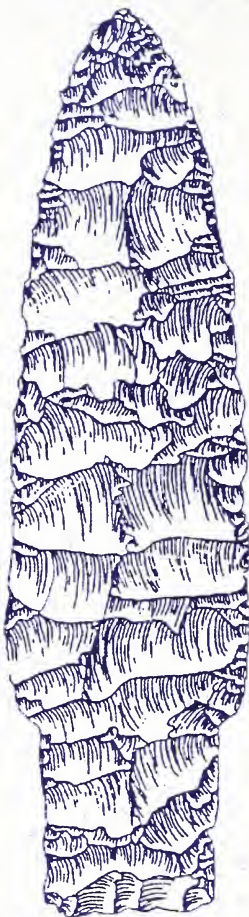
Excavation at the Hudson-Meng Site is a cooperative effort. Our partners include:

Colorado State University  
Chadron State College  
University of Wyoming  
University of Nebraska-Lincoln  
Pine Ridge Job Corps









Alberta Projectile Point  
found in the bonebed.

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